Research Study

Politicization of International Technical Organizations

C E N T R A L   I N T E L L I G E N C E   A G E N C Y

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE
OFFICE OF POLITICAL RESEARCH

August 1975

POLITICIZATION OF INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL
ORGANIZATIONS

by

STATINTL

NOTE: This study was reviewed by representatives
of other offices in the CIA and of other govern-
mental agencies, but no attempt at formal coordina-
tion was made. For further information about this
study, please call
code

25X1A

25X1A

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

CONTENTS

CHARTS

INTRODUCTION AND KEY JUDGMENTS

The United States has experienced varying degrees of success and difficulty in achieving its goals within the United Nations system over the years. There is a growing perception, however, that during the past two years the actions of a coalition of the world's small states has made the maintenance of US interests in that body more difficult than ever. *Politicization* has become the standard term used by bureaucrats, journalists, congressmen, and academics to describe the wide spectrum of difficulties which the US now faces in international institutions. There has been particular concern that politicization has now spread from the General Assembly to the international technical and specialized organizations which the US has long valued as assemblies where the technical bases for broader international cooperation could be somewhat dispassionately established.

This study attempts to measure whether, and in what forms, politicization is increasing in these technical organizations, and what the consequences could be for US

interests. Particular attention is given to establishing whether political issues have altered or interfered with the chartered mission and work of these agencies, and to sorting out any rising trends of political debate from the standard "noise level" of politics which is found in all international gatherings. This study also examines the meaning of politicization as seen by many of the US officials who must deal most directly with its manifestations and consequences.

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

This study finds that despite a high level of political rhetoric, external political issues appear to have caused only minor damage to the substantive effectiveness of these organizations. The dichotomy between *rhetorical* and *substantive* politicization is rooted in the character and operating environment of the technical organizations as well as in the contradictory interests of the member-states. Thus, while the LDCs may find political speeches essential to a particular occasion, they are often either unwilling or unable to disrupt the functioning of these groups. This reflects in some cases their anticipation of benefits from the organizations, and in other cases their

lack of specific interest or technical competence in the matters at hand.

The low level of actual damage from politicization thus far also reflects the strong US position in these organizations -- especially the high caliber of its expertise and its good standing with the professional secretariats. Prospects are good that, by pursuing these advantages, the US can act to maintain the dichotomy and prevent any progression beyond rhetorical political activity in the technical organizations.

PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICIZATION
IN TECHNICAL ORGANIZATIONS
DERIVED FROM INTERVIEWS

		TYPE OF POLITICIZATION	
		Rhetorical	Substantive
DEGREE OF POLITICIZATION	Low or None	WIIO WMO IAEA	WIIO ICAO WMO UNDP IAEA UNIDO ITU FAO IMCO
	Moderate	ITU IMCO ICAO UNDP	ILO
	High	ILO UNIDO FAO	

A Note on Methodology

Because of the difficulty in obtaining current data on the UN system -- and the international technical agencies in particular -- the authors of this paper employed a variety of approaches to measure the existence and effects of politicization. Ten organizations believed to be representative of the highly diverse "UN family of organizations" were selected as the sample for this study:*

-- International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

-- International Labour Organisation (ILO)

-- Food & Agriculture Organization of the
       United Nations (FAO)

-- World Health Organization (WHO)

-- International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)

-- Universal Postal Union (UPU)

-- International Telecommunications Union (ITU)

-- World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

-- Intergovernmental Maritime Consultative
       Organization (IMCO)

-- United Nations Industrial Development
       Organization (UNIDO)

----

* *The major exclusion from the study sample has been the financial organizations. Their processes and functions were judged too different from the other bodies to permit a valid comparison of evidence concerning politicization.*
    See the appendix for a descriptive chart of 17 technical organizations.

Both factual and impressionistic information about these organizations were gathered in a lengthy series of interviews with those officials in the various US government agencies who deal most directly with the major technical bodies. Generous contributions of time and expertise -- both in interviews and in commenting on a draft version of this paper -- were made by officials in the Bureau of International Organization Affairs of the Department of State; the departments of Agriculture, Labor, and Health, Education and Welfare; the Coast Guard; the Federal Aviation Administration; and the Energy Research and Development Administration.

The distinction made in this paper between rhetorical and substantive politicization was, in fact, a product of apparent contradictions which arose in the course of many of these interviews. Although many officials offered an initial impression that politicization was a serious problem in the organization with which they dealt, they were often unable, in follow-up questioning, to provide examples of changes in programming or budgeting which would indicate major disruption of the organization. This dichotomy -- relatively effective levels of substantive performance despite bitter rhetoric -- was confirmed in searches of the New York Times Data Bank and other reportorial archives for the public record of the meetings and programs of these bodies.

The authors wish to express appreciation to Edward Mickolus, an OPR summer intern, for his contribution to the design and execution of the methodological approach to this study.

DISCUSSION

POLITICIZATION: THE PERCEPTION AND THE REALITY

All definitions tend to be self-serving, and the purposes of a study such as this make it inevitable that the use of the term *politicization* will be somewhat interpretive. The term derives from an assumption of the functionalist school among international relations specialists that the handling of "technical" matters among the world's disparate states can (and should) be carried out in isolation from discussion of contentious political issues which may exist among them. This appears, in fact, to have been part of the shared mind set of many of the representatives of the western powers who established the UN system. In this view -- allowing for some acceptable standard "noise level" of corridor politics -- any introduction or imposition of items extraneous to the purely technical matters on the agenda or program of an organization is *politicization*. In its most significant form, this phenomenon would involve the hindrance of an organization's normal functioning (and by extension the damaging of what the US perceives to be its interests and policies in a particular body). Thus the current interests of the US or

any other country will shape its view of what is "political"
and what is properly technical.

RHETORICAL POLITICIZATION

By any measure, it is clear that both the political
noise level and US awareness of it have risen markedly in
international forums since the late 1960s. This is so
because the number of participants has increased and because
the US has become a principal target of the verbiage. In
addition, the content of political debate in the UN system
has changed: the somewhat familiar ideological differences
of the old East-West confrontation have been replaced (or
perhaps outshouted) by persistent and often shrill economic
and social demands from an aggregation of small states.
Many journalists have, somewhat hastily, described the
verbal exchange between LDCs and the developed nations as
the "new cold war."

In contrast, the pattern of expert opinion and other data
gathered in this study points clearly to the conclusion that --
except for a few issue areas* -- the increasing imposition

---

* *For example, in the ITU the developing countries are demanding
that radio frequencies be allocated to all nations as a shared
natural resource, regardless of any single nation's ability to
utilize them. In many of the organizations the demand for an
expanded executive group is resulting in greater LDC participation
and influence in the inner councils of these groups.*

-7-

of political demands has had little or no effect on the
continued substantive functioning of the international
technical bodies. Thus the politicization process in these
bodies has so far been largely a rhetorical one. Nevertheless,
the distinction between this and those fewer instances of
substantive disruption of the organizations is worth making
because of the widely-held belief that rhetoric is a precursor
of concrete political action. In international (and especially
UN) politics, the unchallenged repetition of certain demands
or behavior *can* lead to their legitimization. But there are
factors which indicate that the dynamics of the current
political rhetoric do not fit past patterns. This and the
nature of the organizations themselves would indicate a
need to refrain from categorizing all instances of political
rhetoric in the UN system as part of a uniformly threatening
situation.

It is quite easy to impose a political or otherwise
unconventional question upon the established routine of an
international organization, since any member usually is
granted the right of submitting an item for discussion.
And given the sometimes dry and technical nature of routine
discussion in these bodies, a political dispute is guaranteed
to be a highly visible and audible affair for the participants.

Such action can take many forms: extraneous declarations
of condemnations are urged for passage; questionable groups
are sponsored for member or observer status; attempts might
be made to expel or suspend a member. In large part because
of the ease with which it can be undertaken, the rising
frequency of political rhetoric gives no real measure of
its impact.

It should also be recognized that the new states of
the international system generally do not share the attitude
of the UN's founding members toward technical bodies. They
tend to view *all* multinational forums as potential platforms
which can place them and their interests before a worldwide
audience. Also, the segregation of technical from political
matters is not yet part of the pattern of conducting domestic
affairs in many LDCs; their political and economic systems
often have not achieved a sufficiently high degree of adminis-
trative specificity to require such distinctions. In this
respect, their behavior in international bodies should be
seen as more natural than calculated.

Bloc politics -- the most visible tactical aspect of
the current politicization -- is not the same phenomenon in
this case that the US has faced in the past with the USSR
and other Communist countries. In general, the LDCs are a bloc

by default of other power sources, and should not neces-
sarily be viewed as "ganging up" by design on the developed
nations. It is often simply their way of pursuing indivi-
dual interests and certainly makes the rhetoric more
visible that it would be if practiced piecemeal. Further-
more, most of the new LDCs entered the international system
with no tradition of the sovereign conduct of foreign
relations, and quickly found group participation to be the
most natural way of articulating the obviously small share
of power they held. This has often been disconcerting to
those states which have ordered their diplomatic relations
primarily on a bilateral basis.

Finally, it must be emphasized that carrying out
protracted political debate in a technical organization
is generally a different and far less fruitful undertaking
than is the case in other international gatherings. Each
of these bodies has a charter which sets its functional
limits, and thus a full constitutional change would be
required to alter its mission to respond to any substantially
different needs and wants on the part of LDCs. Represen-
tatives from developed nations to the meetings of many
organizations are frequently technical experts -- often
uninstructed in diplomacy or their government's official

policy -- who are simply not inclined to discuss what they
consider extraneous issues. In contrast, most LDCs cannot
afford to staff a delegation to each agency, so their rep-
resentative is often a diplomatic official who though
politically sophisticated is over his head in substantive
discussion. Furthermore, procedural controls over debate
and the agenda itself, by both the professional secretariat
staff and the older member-states, can channel discussion
and preclude uncontrolled debate. In addition, most agencies
have a tradition of consensual decisionmaking, which is
inimical to the confrontation of up-or-down voting usually
demanded on political issues.

SUBSTANTIVE POLITICIZATION

Much of the concern over rising levels of rhetorical
politicization has been based on an assumption that where
words are hostile, so are actions. It is often assumed that
under such conditions, these organizations would be either
less able or less willing to serve US needs. This has been
the case in the UN General Assembly where increasing verbal
abuse has, in fact, been associated with mounting defeats
when matters come to a vote. Information collected in these
interviews and from the organizations' records suggest this
association has not been carried over into the specialized
agencies.

With only one exception (the ILO), substantive
politicization appears to have remained low regardless of
the level of rhetorical politicization.* While ineffec-
tiveness and conflicts with US policies certainly do exist,
they are not directly attributable in any significant degree
to politicization. In response to questions concerning
agendas, budgets, programs, technical coordination, and
information collection, US representatives' answers
indicated no significant reduction of those services
valuable to US interests.** Most of those interviewed
recalled only occasional incidents where rhetorical
politicization had seriously impeded technical work and
noted that verbal hostilities generally did not affect
substance. These observations were confirmed by the
records of the organizations. Little change has been
noted in programs important to the US during the past

---

* *See chart following p.3.*

** *The rhetorical and substantive politicization distinction was
developed from this apparent discrepancy -- interviewees' initial
assessment of advanced politicization in their organization compared
with later assertions that substantive output had not changed. The
discrepancy seemed best explained by dividing politicization into
two sub-categories. As discussed above, this distinction not only
seemed necessary to understand the results of the interviews but was
also supported by objective data drawn from records and press reports.*

several years of increasing rhetorical attacks. Some
organizations, such as IMCO, have slightly enlarged their
services, which are valuable primarily to industrialized
states. Where technical assistance programs for LDCs have
been added or increased, they have been financed through
additional funds and have not displaced basic services.
Both sets of evidence indicate that these organizations are
performing their technical functions and serving US
interests at normal levels -- which vary widely among
organizations -- regardless of levels of rhetorical
politicization.

Levels of substantive politicization have also
remained low despite the varying lengths of time that these
organizations have been subject to rhetorical politiciza-
tion. Although this does not mean that the distinction
between rhetorical and substantive politicization will
necessarily continue, it does suggest that substantive
politicization is not a simple product of rhetorical
politicization. The linkage seems equally tenuous in
reverse: in the few cases where rhetorical excesses were
perceived to have diminished in recent years (the ITU and
WHO), there was no noted regression in whatever low levels
of substantive politicization existed. It is also

interesting to note that the one case of substantive politicization, the International Labour Organisation -- where both State Department and Labor Department officials perceived a moderate degree of substantive politicization -- was not attributed to developed countries/less developed countries animosities, but to tensions between democratic and socialist ideologies.*

Most of those interviewed noted that increasing levels of rhetorical friction did consume valuable conference time allotted to substantive business. Even for those organizations where rhetorical politicization was characterized as moderate (ITU, IMCO, ICAO, and UNDP) or high (UNIDO, FAO), however, the officers did not see this displacement as a serious impediment to the work of the organization. Agenda planning and adherence have clearly become more difficult; but those interviewed felt that they -- with the assistance of sympathetic secretariat officials and chairmen -- could still exert sufficient influence to insure that business in which the US has interests is completed.

---

* Since US substantive interests and goals in this organization are quite diffuse, assessment of impediments to those interests and goals is, at best, tenuous. The ILO is interesting, however, as an organization in which LDCs have taken few strong stands and US proposals (both formal and informal) have met opposition largely from Soviet members and from West European socialists.

In many cases, rhetorical assaults have become institutionalized: the same speech is made by the same delegate year after year and time is duly alloted for the expected interruptions. In WHO, conference speeches on Israeli intransigence by Arab members and on the status of Puerto Rico by Cuban representatives are an expected annual event. In one conference, where debates on political issues such as Israeli/Arab affairs were predictable, the last two conference days -- after substantive business had been completed -- were reserved for this discussion. This insured that uninterrupted time would be available for technical business and helped to insulate technical decision-making from political tensions. The effectiveness of such maneuvers led most of the interviewees to conclude that the time factor of politicization is at present far more an inconvenience than a threat to substantive work.

Other explanations for continued US influence in the substantive work of these agencies are strong US relations with secretariat officers, the technical expertise of delegations, and the comparative lack of LDC involvement in technical substance of most of these organizations.

Perhaps the most important aid to insuring the uninterrupted conduct of these organizations' substantive

business is the quality of US relations with key members
of the secretariat. In most organizations the secretariat
is the originating point for agenda planning; if the US is
to exercise influence towards minimizing time lost to
rhetorical assaults and insulating substantive considera-
tions from such disruptions, close ties with the secretariat
are vital. As with the weight of US expertise in conference
delegations, able and long-term US appointees in agency
secretariats greatly increase US substantive influence.

In those organizations which are primarily conduits of
aid and assistance, self-interests are a major restraint
upon LDCs' moving from rhetorical battles into substantive
battles. UNDP, FAO, UNIDO have all been protected from
extended substantive disruption because LDC majorities
clearly prefer that business be completed and their programs
executed.*

---

* *UNIDO may become the first exception to this generality if its
structural changes and conversion to independent organization and
Specialized Agency status -- which is a result of LDC pressures for
institutional reforms that they believe will give them greater control --
diminishes its capacity to execute assistance programs through loss of
financial support from developed countries. The results of its re-
organization will not be apparent, however, for two or three years.*

*This principle of LDC restraint by direct self-interest also
applies to various bodies within organizations. Several interviewees
noted, for example, that LDCs intercede with political speeches far
less frequently in committees concerned directly with assistance
programs than those concerned with matters such as statistics collection.*

Other technical organizations, however, serve primarily the major developed powers which have global communications and transport industries. Although ICAO, IMCO, ITU, and WMO have acquired technical assistance programs, the main burden of their activities is still regulation, coordination, and collection of information which chiefly is of value to states with large commercial interests in these fields. In these cases the complexity of these technical subjects and the weight of US expertise insulates the substantive from the rhetorical. LDCs lack the staffing and information to oppose positions on topics such as the fine points of new shipping and air transport regulations. Federal regulations devised in the US to coordinate interstate commerce and communication have served worldwide as models for international regulations in these fields. Compared to industrialized states, LDCs have relatively small interests in the details of these regulatory agreements and little motivation for opposing US policies on these issues. Most of the opposition the US meets in such organizations is, in fact, from other developed countries and derived from substantive rather than political differences.

Within the narrow confines of the substantive deliberations of these technical organizations, then, the

US enjoys not only technical advantages, but also a
surprising capacity to insulate them from its mounting
ideological liabilities. This insulation is, however,
the product of these organizations' particular atmosphere
and subject matter. It does not appear to be the case in
other international bodies. Just as the assumption that
the General Assembly's pattern of substantive losses
following close upon rhetorical losses has been found not to
apply to these specialized organizations, so their separation
of rhetorical and substantive matters is not feasible to the
same degree in other UN entities.

THE POLITICS OF TECHNICAL ORGANIZATIONS

The reality of politicization in the technical
organizations has remained uniquely low, but its perception
has not. The apparent impact of politicization has been
greatly magnified beyond its real dimensions by two primary
factors: the suddenness and consistency with which the US
lately has found itself in a minority position; and the
contrast with a brief preceding period of unusually low
politicization in the mid and late 1960s.

During the immediate post-World War II period, the
rhetorical politicization accompanying the Cold War was far
more pronounced than at present. Substantive politicization

also seems to have reached a higher level, with much greater paralysis of international technical work, during those East-West confrontations. Yet few western representatives, scholars, and journalists expressed concern then over the political nature of these battles which the US, with its majority backing, often won. Current concern is at least as much a result of the US minority position as of the intrusion of politics upon technical bodies.

The current period was preceded by a phase of unusually low political controversy in these organizations. Between the de-emphasis of Cold War competition in multilateral forums and the rise in numbers and consciousness of non-aligned states (which came slightly later here than in the General Assembly), there was a short period during the 1960s when these agencies came closer than ever before to approximating the functionalist ideal of apolitical delibera-tions. This period was an aberration, not a norm. The current acceleration of political controversies in these forums, thus, is perhaps best seen as a return to normal conditions. It seems more natural that the tensions of "high politics" seep down to these technical bodies than that cooperation born of technical coordination will carry over into those bodies dealing primarily with foreign policy matters.

There appears, however, to be sufficient room in
these bodies for both political controversy and technical
functions -- as long as sufficient distinction is made
between the rhetorical and substantive manifestations of
politics. It seems clear that these organizations
do not have to be essentially apolitical -- and they
are not likely to be -- in order to achieve their prescribed
work and to serve US technical needs and interests.

Under present conditions, the only foreseeable threat
to US technical needs and interests would be a conscious
and concerted effort by LDCs to break down this rhetorical/
substantive distinction and to hold substantive decision-
making hostage to political goals. Such a strategy --
especially in those organizations which primarily serve
industrial powers -- could be quite effective given LDCs'
conference majorities and their increasing representation
on governing bodies. It would also be consistent with non-
aligned ideology which has recently turned from demanding
a greater share of the world's wealth to demanding a new
system of allocating that wealth. A campaign to gain
approval in these organizations for a point of non-aligned
dogma, such as the New International Economic Order, could
challenge the US substantive advantages.

-20-

Thus far, however, the LDCs have not tended to use votes on technical subjects as leverage for unrelated political concessions. Until such developments emerge, the strength of US positions on substantive issues -- compared to its liabilites in rhetorical battles -- warrants encouragement of continued separation of rhetorical and substantive contests.

APPENDIX

GLOSSARY OF

ORGANIZATION ABBREVIATIONS

FAO—   Food & Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

GATT—   General Agreement on Tariffs & Trade

IAEA—   International Atomic Energy Agency

IBRD—   International Bank for Reconstruction & Development
              (generally called the World Bank)

ICAO—   International Civil Aviation Organization

IDA—   International Development Association

IFC—   International Finance Corporation

ILO—   International Labour Organisation

IMCO—   Intergovernmental Maritime Consultative Organization

IMF—   International Monetary Fund

ITU—   International Telecommunications Union

UNESCO—   United Nations Educational, Scientific &
              Cultural Organization

UNIDO—   United Nations Industrial Development Organization

UPU   Universal Postal Union

WHO—   World Health Organization

WIPO—   World Intellectual Property Organization

WMO—   World Meteorological Organization

A-1

INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL & SPECIALIZED ORGANIZATIONS

Name of Organization	IMF	IBRD	IFC	IDA	ITU	ICAO	IMCO	UPU	GATT	WIPO	FAO	UNESCO	WHO	ILO	IAEA	WMO	UNIDO
Date Founded	1944	1944	1956	1960	1865	1947	1958	1875	1948	1970	1945	1946	1948	1919	1957	1873	1967
Location of Hqs.	Washington	Washington	Washington	Washington	Geneva	Montreal	London	Berne	Geneva	Geneva	Rome	Paris	Geneva	Geneva	Vienna	Geneva	Vienna
Frequency of Assembly Meetings	Annual	Annual			Every 5 years	Triennial	Biennial	Every 5 years	Annual	Triennial	Biennial	Biennial	Annual	Annual	Annual	Quadrennial	Annual
Number of Member-States[1]	126	123	98	112	143	129	88	154	143	92	131	135	143	125	108	128	114
Number of Members in the Executive	20[2]	20[2]			36	27	18	31	N/A	N/A	12	40	24	56[5]	34	24[7]	45
Number of Regional Offices	Liaison offices 2	23	5		N/A	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	6	51	6	4[6]	N/A	N/A	1
Size of Secretariat Staff	1,324	3,989	207	23 3,989	795	465	175	195	190	157	3,174	3,185	3,850	3,200	1,190	320	1,041
Amount of Regular (Assessed) Budget	Admin Budget (74) SDR 48.4M	Admin expenses US $110M	Admin expenses US $10.1M	Management fee to IBRD $47.6M	$15,000,000	$13,357,000	$3,001,500	$11,039,400	$26,335,000	$2,183,625	$62,690,000	$77,890,000	$129,664,620	$45,134,500	$26,660,000	$7,465,630	$21,393,000
US Contribution to the Regular Budget	25% of total quota[3]	Share purchase 25% of equity	Same as IBRD	Holdings of 33% of current useable resources	$ 3,249,000	$ 3,389,250	$ 142,996	$ 273,777	$ 3,805,400	$ 64,215	$13,347,500	$22,211,152	$ 29,401,453	$11,283,625	$ 7,429,204	$1,571,073	25%, as part of general UN contribution
Revenue Sources Outside of Regular Budget	Service charge on sale of exchanges. Rising periodic charge to members holding excess currency quota	Repayment of loans Investments Fees Exchange adjustments	Same as IBRD	Same as IBRD	Publications; voluntary contributions for technical assistance	Publications; voluntary contributions for technical assistance	Publications	Publications; voluntary contributions for technical assistance		Special contributions Registration services Publications ($4,738,000)	Publications library & documentation	Voluntary contributions; publications	Publications	Publications; trust funds	Voluntary contributions for technical assistance, publications	Publications; voluntary contributions for technical assistance	UNDP; voluntary contributions to general trust fund

Except where otherwise noted, the data presented here is for calendar year 1975 (U.S. FY-1976).

[1] There were 138 members in the United Nations as of 1 January 1975.

[2] 5 directors are appointed by the 5 member-states having the largest shares of capital stock (IBRD) or quotas (IMF).

[3] The IMF maintains a quota system which is revised every five years. The present total quota is 6.7 B SDR of which the US contributes 23%. Funds derived from interest charges and other periodic charges to members holding currency in excess of their quotas are used for operating and administrative expenses.

[4] The governors and exec. directors of the IBRD representing gov'ts which are IFC members hold identical positions for IFC. IDA's directors, officers and staff are those of the IBRD, serving ex officio with IDA. Annual meetings of the IBRD, IFC, and IDA are held simultaneously.

[5] 28 gov't members, 14 employers' members, and 14 workers' members. Ten of the gov't members represent "states of chief industrial importance." U.S., Canada, China, France, India, Italy, Japan, USSR, U.K., and Fed. Rep. of Germany.

[6] The ILO also maintains 18 area offices and 9 branch offices.

[7] 1 president, 3 vice presidents, 6 presidents of regional associations, 14 heads of meterological services elected by the congress.

For Official Use Only

For Official Use Only